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## Book Week

# An old revolutionary looks at the new ones

By Gabriel Gersh

THE YEAR OF THE YOUNG REBELS. By Stephen Spender. Random House. \$4.95; paperback, \$1.95.

American student activists would regard Stephen Spender as a reactionary. For there is no reactionary like the one who has lived through the agonies of the 1930s and who has taken the present student revolts as a sudden, unexpected revival of his own youthful dreams. Yet for all this and his association with the Congress of Cultural Freedom, Spender has written a book that illuminates the meaning of the student rebellions that have convulsed so many universities.

His book consists of four impressionistic descriptions of student views and activities in New York, Paris, Prague and Berlin, concluding with three chapters in which he attempts to make sense of it all. Unfortunately, interspersed among these chapters are such irrelevancies as a memento on his bafflement at the Enounter-CIA affair, to illustrate the "cynicism of governments."

At Columbia University Spender was asked whether the student revolt of last spring reminded him of the Spanish Civil War in which he had been deeply involved, and he tells us that it did in certain ways. He mentions small parallels like the passionate telephoning and the flow of messages and messengers. But in a more important way Spender seems to be reminded of Spain when he assumes that — now as then — revolutionary idealism is an expression of youth and will yield to disillusionment with the passage of time.

Spender believes that whatever the course followed by the administration at Columbia during the convulsion, the result would have been the same. For social and psychological reasons many students want

such confrontation, defining themselves through antagonism to the university. Here, as in other universities, he found students eschewing long-range political strategy like that of student movements of the 1930s, localizing and personalizing the issues and, above all, believing in spontaneity. Riots, sit-ins, the occupation of buildings — all have taken the place of organization and program and often seem to relieve the sense of frustration exacerbated by the difficulties of explaining why it is felt.

With understanding and compassion, Spender recounts the determination of the students of Prague to win the very liberty and affluence the ideologues of the West reject. It upsets him that the Western New Left disgraced itself by criticizing the Czech experiment under Dubcek which believes that freedom can be built into a Communist system that shakes off the legacy of Stalinism. To others, however, the plight of the Czech student underlined the narrowness of the New Left's preoccupations, for the Czech students faced enemies in the form of Stalinist prisons and Red censorship, while the Rudds, Dutschkes and Cohn-Bendits behaved like modern counterparts of Bakuninist romantics for whom even Marx and Lenin had contempt.

So sympathetic is Spender's treatment of the student revolt that some may regard the final conclusion as naive. He believes that perpetual revolutionists can co-exist with serious academics, making a pact of non-interference. He argues that if the revolutionists concentrated on important social issues like overpopulation and city planning instead of ill-defined revolutionary aims or trivial issues like university discipline, such co-existence might be useful.

Whether one agrees with this formula for student peace, the book should be savored for the pleasure of its fringe benefits: an account of Allen Ginsberg and the hippies, a brief but succinct portrait of prewar Oxford and, more important, an examination of obscene journalism, an offshoot of the student revolution. All this adds up to a stimulating appraisal of the student revolt by a middle-aged intellectual, whose humaneness and breadth of vision are equal to the complexity of the subject.

Starting this week and continuing through the summer months, Showcase will publish book reviews to supplement book coverage in special seasonal issues of Book Week on June 8, June 22, July 13 and Aug. 17 and in Family Magazine each Wednesday. Full-scale publication of Book Week will resume in September.

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